

STEAMBOATS

ON THE ARKANSAS. The transportation equation changed on March 31, 1820, when the *Comet*, the first steamboat to enter the Arkansas, arrived at Arkansas Post. It had left New Orleans a mere 18 days before.

The *Comet* was followed in short order by other steamers, including the *Eagle*, the *Robert Thompson*, the *Florence*, the *Velocipede*, the *Scioto*, the *Catawba*, the *Highland Laddy*, and the *Facility*.

"The heyday of this river traffic was the 1840s and 1850s," Settle wrote, "when 22 landings between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson could be counted."

Since 1832, Congress had been appropriating limited funds to improve navigation in the region. The River and Harbor Act of that year authorized Army Engineers to maintain a channel in the Arkansas to the mouth of the Grand. They were granted \$15,000 to do the job. Intermittent funds were later granted for snagging, dredging, modifying channels, removing bars, and building revetment works. High water often washed away the benefits from these activities.

The earliest report of a Corps of Engineers survey on the Arkansas was submitted to Congress in 1870. Engineer S.T. Albert reported that steamers carrying 700 tons could reach Fort Smith during winter months and during the June rise. Above Fort Smith to Fort Gibson, the narrow channel was obstructed by snags that largely precluded travel of anything other than small steamers carrying about 300 tons. Albert reported that more than 25,000 tons annually was shipped through Fort Gibson, including more than \$5 million in dry goods, groceries, hardware machinery, tobacco, lead, and coal.

